



Taking Another Listen

Summary report
April 2023

Audience research with people of color to help make classical music radio more welcoming

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Foreword

Brenda Barnes, CEO
Classical KING
Seattle



In the Fall of 2019, my Classical KING colleagues and I began a strategic planning process by interviewing more than a hundred people living in Seattle and the Puget Sound region. We asked them about the community we share, the arts in their lives, and Classical KING. Among other things, we heard

loud and clear that community members expected our station – and all arts organizations in the region – to demonstrate a commitment to equity, starting with diversifying our audience.

The existing data didn't really help us work toward that goal. If you're reading this report, you probably already know that only one company provides audience data for radio and television: Nielsen. Their ethnicity statistics are limited to Black, Hispanic, White, and Other. Moreover, Nielsen's sample size for Hispanic and Black listeners is very small, so the data tends to swing wildly. That's why so many of us in public

broadcasting have lobbied Nielsen for years to offer more detail on listening and viewing by race/ethnicity, so we can understand how to engage and serve more people in our communities. Nielsen has steadfastly refused.

So, I decided to commission a local-plus-national research project to help Classical KING and other public media organizations learn more about the relationship that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in the U.S. have with classical music.

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foreword (continued)

After vetting research firms and determining that Slover Linett was the best partner, I invited three colleagues in New York City, Philadelphia, and Oklahoma City to join the project, to help shape it from the outset and to coordinate research specific to their very different communities. In addition, Slover Linett suggested creating a small advisory group of experts who work at the intersection of equity and classical music radio, to help frame the research questions and bring their perspectives to the process. That group has been incredibly valuable, and all of us are grateful to them for investing their time and trust in this project.

Classical music and the arts have a long history of exclusion born from racism. While it's painful to acknowledge that history, it's the only authentic way to proceed. This study demonstrates that we can and must do more to ensure that all feel welcomed by our stations.

We hope this summary report provides valuable information for all kinds of public media and performing arts organizations working toward equity. **Remarkably, we think this may be one of the only social research studies to date to look at classical music radio audiences through the lens of race and ethnicity.** We hope there will be many others.

I look forward to the work ahead, both here at Classical KING and around the country. My deepest thanks to everyone involved in this project – and to you, for reading this report and striving for equity with us.

With gratitude,



Brenda Barnes

CEO, Classical KING FM

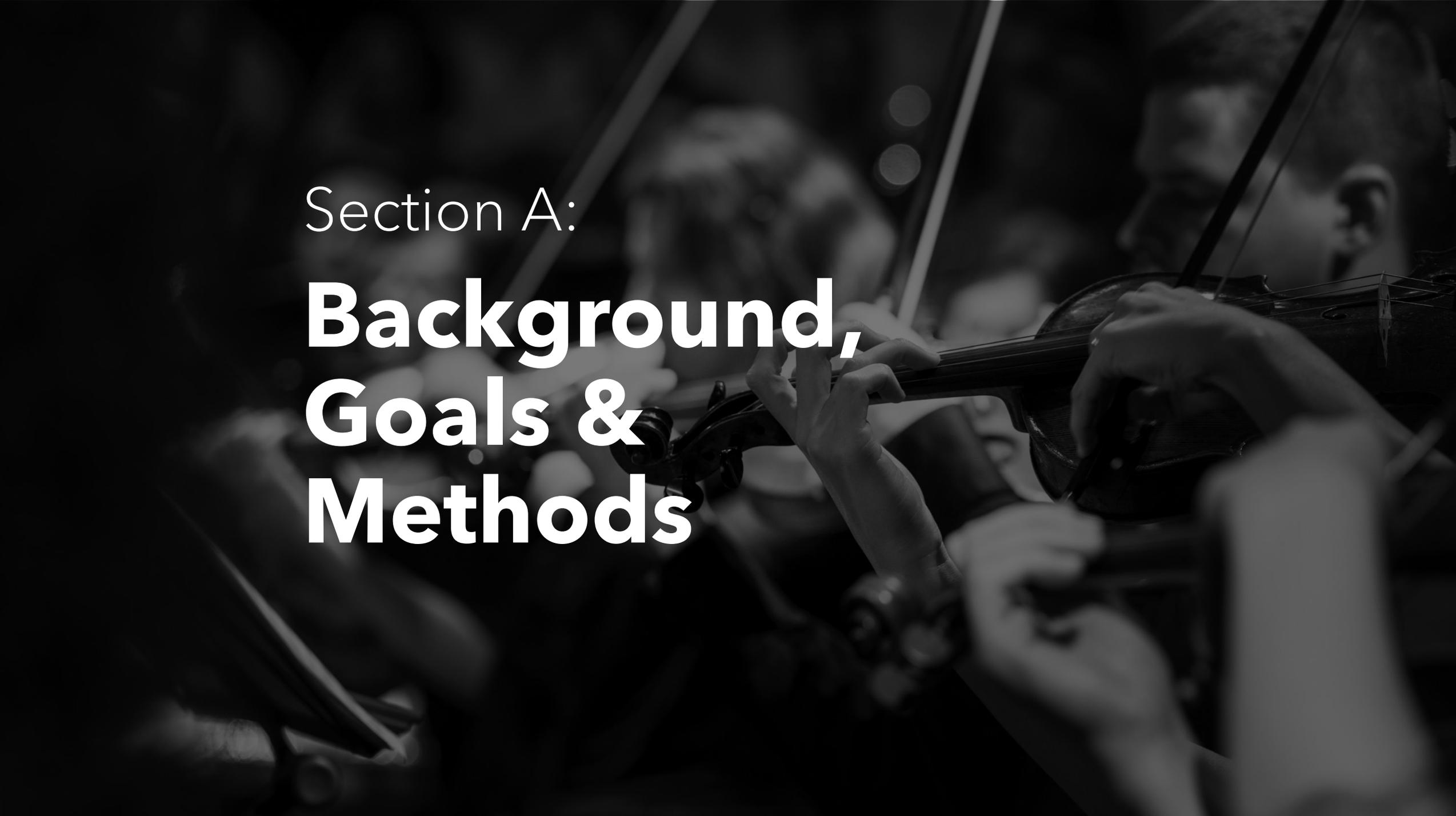


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Section A:

Background, Goals & Methods

Team

Classical KING FM in Seattle brought together three other listener-supported classical music radio stations and the Chicago-based research firm Slover Linett for **an equity-focused national research collaboration**. The study would examine how classical radio may need to rethink, experiment and evolve in order to develop deeper relationships with listeners of color.

Participating stations included KING FM 98.1 in Seattle, WRTI 90.1 FM in Philadelphia, WQXR 105.9 FM in New York City (a unit of New York Public Radio), and KUCO 90.1 FM in Oklahoma City. Karen Yair, vice president of research and resources at the League of American Orchestras, brought additional perspectives from the live-performance field.

SLOVER LINETT RESEARCH TEAM



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Ed Yim
Senior Vice President
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FM, New York City



Karen Yair
Vice President, Research
and Resources, League of
American Orchestras

Expert advisors

Making classical music more equitable and welcoming is an active endeavor across the field. Many innovators and activists are working toward that goal and changing practice, perceptions, and systems. We knew that this study would need multiple perspectives, especially from practitioners already engaging diverse listeners in new ways.

So, we're deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to think with and hear from four of those innovators over the course of this project – people working in radio and podcasting to reframe classical music and make it more relatable to a wider range of people and communities. These paid advisors brought candor, power, and creativity to every conversation, and helped us make richer meaning from the research findings and tie them more closely to changes already in motion around the field.



Emilio Alvarez is the host of Breakfast Blend with KMFA 89.5, an independent public classical radio station in Austin, TX. He is a cellist, composer, broadcaster, and advocate for Latinx artists. Emilio's work spans mediums: from visual art and stage performances to broadcast radio and television. Today, Emilio's cello can be heard playing Classical, Jazz, and Latin music.



Lara Downes was named 2022 Classical Woman of the Year by Performance Today. Her work as a sought-after soloist, a Billboard Chart-topping recording artist, a producer, curator, and arts advocate positions her as a cultural visionary on the national arts scene. She is the creator and host of AMPLIFY with Lara Downes, a video series for NPR Music, and she serves as Resident Artist and Host for Classical KDFC in San Francisco and Classical KUSC in Los Angeles.



Dr. Quinton Morris enjoys a multifaceted career as a concert violinist, chamber musician, educator, entrepreneur, and filmmaker. He is the host of Unmute The Voices, a radio show and video series with classical KING FM 98.1 in Seattle, which aims to accelerate the development of equity in classical music by increasing the visibility of the BIPOC community in classical music.



Jade Simmons, an acclaimed classical concert pianist, pivoted from playing the piano to impress audiences to using the piano as the vehicle for inspiration, entertainment, and transformation that profoundly moves them instead. Jade has remained committed to expanding the boundaries of classical music and its presentation. She's host for American Public Media's hit podcast, Decomposed.

MISSING AUDIENCES

We all know from previous studies (and from our own experiences) that both classical music radio and live classical performances disproportionately attract older White audiences.



The National Endowment for the Arts' 2008 *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* noted that 83% of people who reported attending a classical music performance in the past year were White. Similarly, the 2017 Walrus Research *Classical Station Trends, National AudiGraphics* report noted that Black listeners made up only 5% of PPM (portable people meter) classical radio audiences, and Hispanic listeners made up only 9%, despite being 14% and 19%, respectively, of the U.S. population. And the racial disparity is not about access to radio: according to Nielsen's 2021 *Total Audience Report*, US adults of all racial and ethnic groups listened to radio on a weekly basis at roughly similar rates: 87% for Black, 92% for Hispanic, and 85% for White. Comparable statistics for Indigenous and Asian listeners were not provided in the above studies.

The numbers also show that the audience for classical music skews older, both for attendance at live performances and for radio listening. The League of American Orchestras' 2009 *Audience Demographic Research Review* showed that the audience for live classical music was graying faster than the overall population. And Walrus's 2017 *Classical Station Trends* report noted that classical radio audiences were older than the median age in the U.S.: depending on stations' market size, the median age of classical listeners was between 62 and 66 years old.

Older and Whiter than our changing population? **Not a formula for equity, relevance, or growth.**

LOOKING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD

Before we can make progress as a field, we need to acknowledge and examine classical music's historical – and ongoing – exclusions, hierarchies, and harms.

Many cultures around the world have 'classical' traditions in the arts and other domains. But in everyday English usage, as noted in the Oxford Dictionary, the term 'classical music' is understood to mean the Western musical traditions that emerged and evolved in 17th, 18th, and 19th century Europe. In other words, in predominantly White cultures.

The Oxford definition adds that classical music is "generally considered to be serious and to have a lasting value." **To us, and probably to many of you reading this report, this special value ascribed to classical music is highly problematic.** It's not that this music *isn't* valuable. It's just that other kinds of music, with origins in very different cultures, times and places, are *also* valuable. The hierarchy of authority and value that has put Western classical music on a cultural pedestal has also undervalued and diminished music of other styles and traditions. By extension, it has elevated White culture and people and devalued...well, almost every other culture and people.

Historically, that hierarchy wasn't accidental. It was part of the broader European project of justifying colonialism and slavery through the invention of race, "culture" and "civilization." And those legacies are still present in the economic, governance, and social structures of the U.S. nonprofit arts and culture system, and in the training and incentives of many arts leaders, artists, critics, donors, and trustees. The past is still with us, even while powerful, positive change is beginning to occur.



“

Classical music was created brimming in white supremacy. In order to really have transparency, and to have transformation across the board, I think that has to be addressed.”

Dr. Quinton Morris, inaugural Artist-Scholar-in-Residence at Classical KING FM in Seattle and an advisor to this study.

“

We're in an era where suddenly large institutions, large companies, are seemingly interested in DEAI. And as a speaker who's brought in on DEAI, one of the questions we ask is, how are the people really feeling about this discussion? Am I coming into a room where they're secretly giving me eye-rolls because they don't want to hear the phrase DEAI anymore, or is this a room that's actively and curiously interested in doing something different?"

Jade Simmons, award-winning pianist and sought-after speaker, and an advisor to this study.

Image: Steven Grant Foto



OUR INTENTIONS FOR THIS RESEARCH

The research team and project partners wanted to learn more about the relationships people of color have to classical music (and to radio listening), without assuming or conveying that this music is superior or that everyone “should” listen to it.

We take as our starting point that classical music is one among many forms of human creativity and expression, and that, despite being European in its origins, it has always evolved through the talent of individuals with a wide range of identities and from a wide variety of places and cultures. Some of those individuals thrived during their careers and contributed significantly to the art form but were later systematically erased by the White classical music establishment – and are now, in some cases, being “rediscovered” and restored to the repertoire and history books.

Meanwhile, classical music in the U.S. has largely been presented and controlled by institutions that have historically favored only a limited range of classical creators and offered access to only a limited range of people in their communities. That is now changing, and classical radio is a critical mode of public access to this music – and a crucial part of its future.

We conducted this study in the hope that, by centering the voices of people of color across the country, we could glean insights that will help the field of classical music radio become more welcoming, inclusive, and connected to diverse communities. We were eager to hear not from public-radio station members or self-selected classical music fans, but from a broad range of everyday people.



“

Underrepresented voices, I don't like that phrase. There's this narrative that all composers of color struggled in their own time against unfathomable adversity and were never able to accomplish what they wanted to – which is a very one-dimensional narrative. Especially if we're talking about composers during the Harlem renaissance, the Chicago Black renaissance: they were working in a time of intense productivity, creativity, and community. We have to look at history through a wide and inclusive lens, or these composers and their music end up getting minimized.”

Lara Downes, award-winning pianist and an advisor to this study.

“

In Europe, popular music and classical music diverged so extremely. But in the Latin community, the two have walked hand in hand for a long, long time. Even today there's so much overlap. Therefore, I don't think our focus should be on the relevance or irrelevance of 'classical music' to our listeners. Instead, we must adjust our musical scope to embrace the sounds of the broader community.”

Emilio Alvarez, cellist, composer and radio host, and an advisor to this study.



RESEARCH PROCESS

This report presents combined highlights from a two-phase mixed-methods research process that was fielded in summer and fall 2022.



The first phase of this research consisted of 24 interviews with people of color living in Seattle, New York City, Oklahoma City, and Philadelphia. The 24 participants represented a range of different relationships to classical music, but none were listeners of the classical radio station in their city. From these interviews, the project working group (which included staff from all four stations and the Slover Linett team) developed a range of broad, preliminary engagement concepts to ask about in the survey.

The second phase of the study was a quantitative survey fielded to a national, general-population sample via emails sent by a third-party research “panel.” We sought a minimum of 1,500 responses equally split across five racial and ethnic groups. The survey was designed to measure music listening behaviors generally; perceptions of and engagement with classical music specifically; and interest in the potential engagement concepts, all with an eye toward understanding differences by race/ethnicity and age.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The working group for this study developed a set of guiding questions about listeners of color.

- 1 What are people's music-listening behaviors and motivations, and how do *classical music* and *radio listening* fit into that context?
- 2 What role do *hosts* play in music listening? How do they factor into exploration and expansion of musical tastes?
- 3 What are people's perceptions of classical music, instrumental music, and various classical-adjacent musical forms? What are the motivations and barriers to engagement with these forms and genres?
- 4 How do the answers to all these questions align and diverge across different racial and ethnic identities?
- 5 What are some specific "doorway" strategies and tactics for engaging audiences of color?

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

This survey represents a unique opportunity to understand Americans of color as distinct racial and ethnic groups – not as a single “BIPOC” sample.

The survey responses came from individuals in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. We were pleased to receive responses from more than 300 people in each of the racial and ethnic groups that were most prevalent in the listening areas of the working group stations.

1,662 TOTAL RESPONDENTS

332 people who identified as
ASIAN

341 people who identified as
BLACK

340 people who identified as
INDIGENOUS

314 people who identified as
HISPANIC/LATINX

335 people who identified as
WHITE

Too often, surveys with small sample-sizes are forced to lump together all respondents of color as a single group. This is unfortunate, since every racial and ethnic group has valuable and distinct insights to bring to a study, and these differences can be missed if they are treated as a single, monolithic group. In this national survey, our large samples allowed us to analyze each racial/ethnic group individually and highlight their unique perspectives and experiences. We acknowledge that even this approach isn't perfect, since each broad racial and ethnic category contains many diverse communities and cultures. (Please see page 52 for additional notes.) One way we explore this “within-group” diversity in this report is by separately considering those who are under 40 years old and those who are over 40 within each racial and ethnic category, to better understand how age fits into the overall picture of inclusion and diversity.

A black and white photograph of hands typing on a keyboard. The image is dark, with the hands and keyboard keys highlighted. The text 'Section B: Three New Lenses' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Section B:

Three New Lenses

Section B: Three New Lenses

People of all races and ethnicities listen to classical music.

(It's not just White people.)

Past research tells us that people who listen to classical music radio *and* people who attend live classical music performances are disproportionately White. Which makes some sense, historically: classical music has its origins in European culture.

But in this case, history is not destiny. When you ask people how often they listen – and you let them define classical music themselves – you don't see big differences between racial and ethnic groups. In fact, this study reveals that **race and ethnicity are not key factors** in who listens to classical music.

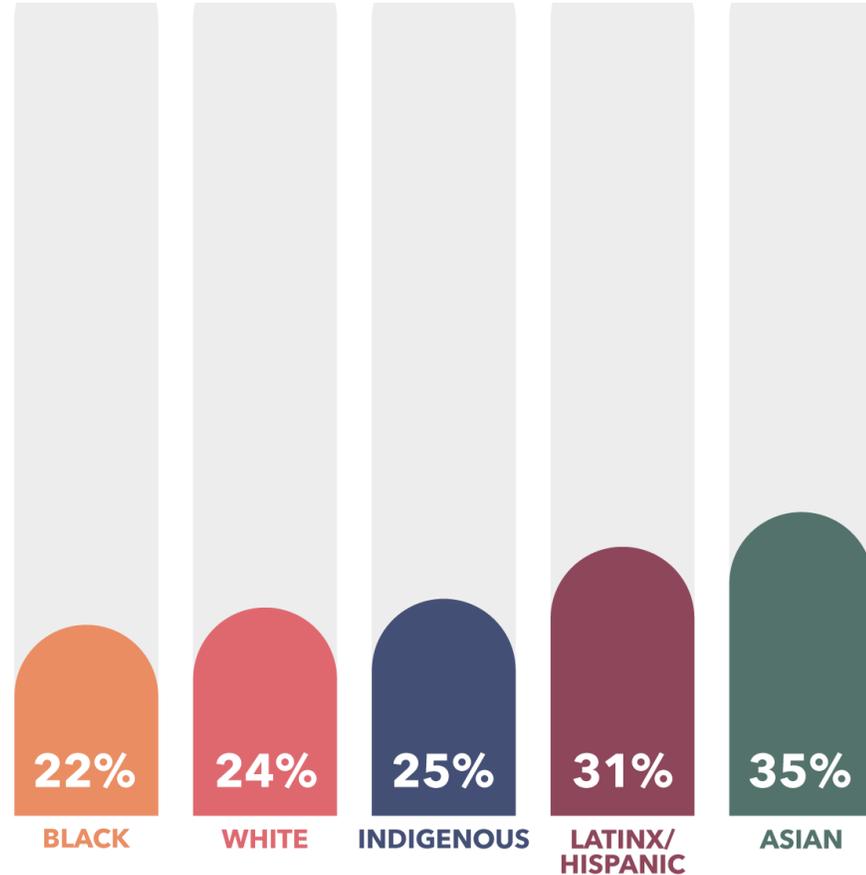
Section B: Three New Lenses

PEOPLE OF ALL RACES & ETHNICITIES LISTEN

People across racial and ethnic groups listen to classical at relatively similar rates.

About a quarter to a third of each racial and ethnic group indicated that they are regular listeners of classical music (i.e., listen once a week or more). People who are White, Black, Indigenous, or Latinx/Hispanic are about equally likely to listen to classical music regularly, and Asian people are somewhat more likely to listen regularly.

Overall, we found that one's self-reported race and ethnicity explains less than 4% of the variance in classical music listening!



We asked respondents how frequently they listen to a range of musical genres, including classical. Circles show percentage of each racial and ethnic group who selected a 3, 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale, indicating they listen once a week or more.

Section B: Three New Lenses

PEOPLE OF ALL RACES & ETHNICITIES LISTEN

Most people (of all races and ethnicities) have either neutral or positive perceptions of classical music – even those who don't listen to it.

We asked respondents to tell us how they feel about classical music on a scale of 1-7, with "1" meaning they "dislike classical music a lot" and "7" meaning they "like classical music a lot." Across racial and ethnic groups, only 5 to 18 percent of each group selected a "1" or "2."



Section B: Three New Lenses

PEOPLE OF ALL RACES & ETHNICITIES LISTEN

People of color find connections to classical music during various phases of life.

Our interviews with BIPOC individuals revealed that some had been listening to classical music since childhood. Others shared stories of how they got into classical music either as teenagers or adults.

“

“I played saxophone growing up, so that added to my passion for it. There are definitely songs I relate to more for nostalgia, like Pachelbel’s Canon when I walked down the aisle.”

Interview participant, self-identified as Latinx/Hispanic

“

“I’ve listened to classical music since I was in middle school. I was in the chorus, and I was always the soloist. And I would listen to classical music and try to listen to the beat and sing along, coming up with my own lyrics.”

Interview participant, self-identified as Black

“

“There was a [classical] show happening, and we got some passes in the office but since everybody was going, I just went with the flow. I liked it, and then there was another [concert] that I saw, and I went to that with my friends.”

Interview participant, self-identified as Asian

Section B: Three New Lenses

Most people listen to classical as part of a broader musical landscape. Classical listeners have a wide range of genres in their ears.

Most classical music research looks at listening or attendance in terms of just that genre. But that's not how it works. If we want to understand how people relate to classical music, we need to look at how they relate to *music generally*.

In many ways, music represents a shared culture in the United States. Some musical genres, such as pop and R&B, are popular across all racial and ethnic groups. However, this study also shows that each racial and ethnic group enjoys **a unique landscape of musical genres**. Classical music is sometimes part of people's landscapes, but only for a minority of people in each racial and ethnic group. Those who do listen to classical music tend to listen to a wide variety of other genres of music, too.

Section B: Three New Lenses

PART OF A BROADER MUSICAL LANDSCAPE

Although some genres have culturally specific origins, music is often enjoyed across identity boundaries.

But our data also reveals distinct musical landscapes for each broad racial and ethnic group.

While pop, rap/hip-hop, and R&B are very popular across *all* racial and ethnic groups, some groups may be uniquely drawn to certain genres. For example, reggae and blues appear in the top 5 genres only for African American or Black respondents, and Latin music only for Latinx/Hispanic respondents. Country music makes it into the top five only for White, Indigenous, and Asian respondents. (Note that classical music doesn't make it into the top five genres for any racial and ethnic group.)

ASIAN

46% Pop
30% Rap/Hip-Hop
28% R&B
23% Rock
23% Country

BLACK

32% Pop
55% Rap/Hip-Hop
65% R&B
18% Reggae
17% Blues

INDIGENOUS

36% Pop
38% Rap/Hip-Hop
38% R&B
44% Rock
28% Country

LATINX/HISPANIC

48% Pop
49% Rap/Hip-Hop
43% R&B
37% Rock
45% Latin

WHITE

42% Pop
27% Rap/Hip-Hop
24% R&B
45% Rock
40% Country

We asked people how often they listened to 12 different genres of music. We found that there were both overlaps and differences in what each racial and ethnic group listened to most frequently (i.e., twice a week or more). For example, R&B and rap/hip-hop are very popular across all racial and ethnic groups.

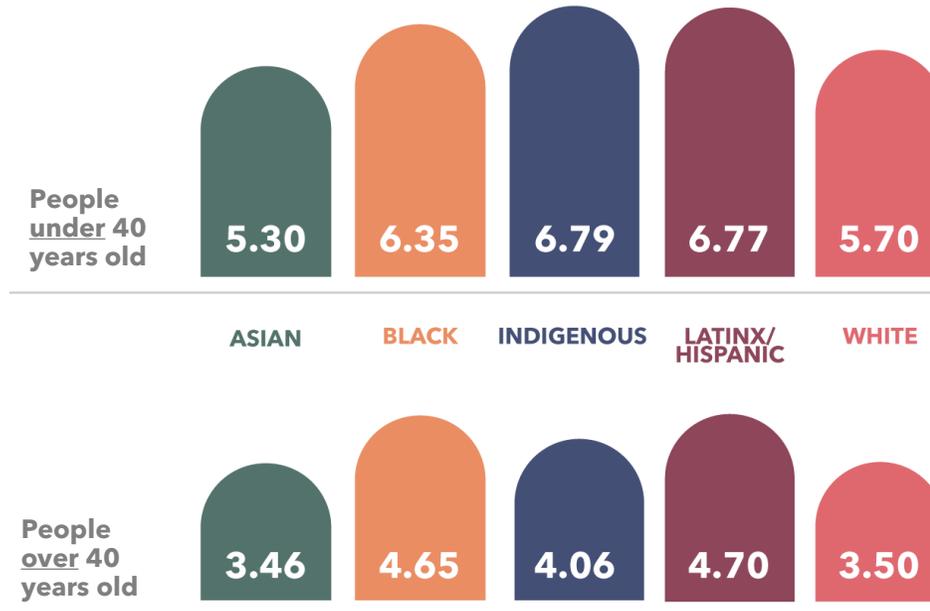
Section B: Three New Lenses

PART OF A BROADER MUSICAL LANDSCAPE

Younger people include music in their lives across an especially wide range of activities.

We asked respondents about the different activities (driving, cleaning, exercising, etc.) they engaged in while listening to music. People under 40 across all races and ethnicities reported listening to a greater variety of musical genres than older people, and they reported listening to music while engaged in a greater range of activities than their older counterparts. This suggests that music may be more intertwined in the lives of young people.

Average number of activities people do while listening to music 'often' or 'very often'



Section B: Three New Lenses

PART OF A BROADER MUSICAL LANDSCAPE

**People of all races/
ethnicities who listen to
classical music tend to
have expansive musical
landscapes.**

A subset of respondents in each racial and ethnic group indicated that they listen to classical music frequently (i.e., twice a week or more). We found these individuals may be more musically adventurous in general: They were more likely to report that they listen frequently to a wide range of other genres, such as reggae, blues, folk, jazz, and electronic music.



Section B: Three New Lenses

There is little agreement on what constitutes "classical music," and many people define that term narrowly.

This study shows that most people (again, across racial and ethnic groups) hold a mental schema of "classical music" that includes the work of famous European composers, such as Beethoven or Mozart. But many people *don't* categorize something as "classical" if the description of it in our survey conveyed a sense of modernity – such as "instrumental music composed in the last ten years" or "a modern remix of music by a famous composer of the past." So, many radio stations may be playing a wider range of "classical music" than people expect from or associate with the genre.

These definitional frames were largely shared across racial and ethnic groups, as well as across age categories.

LITTLE AGREEMENT ON WHAT CONSTITUTES "CLASSICAL"

Across racial and ethnic groups, people agree about the core of "classical music": old, instrumental music.

Most people understand music by famous composers of the past to at least sometimes be classical music, and the same goes for any music played by an orchestra or played on the piano. Black respondents were slightly less likely than other groups to indicate that piano music and music by famous composers such as Mozart or Beethoven would fit their definition of classical music.

Musical contexts most commonly defined as classical:



Music by famous composers from the past such as Mozart or Beethoven



Piano music



Any music played by an orchestra

LITTLE AGREEMENT ON WHAT CONSTITUTES "CLASSICAL"

Many people don't categorize music as "classical" if the description has a whiff of modernity.

More than a quarter of each racial and ethnic group indicated that they would not consider "a modern remix of music by a famous composer from the past" to be "classical music." Similarly, many people felt that movie soundtracks and instrumental music composed in the last 10 years could not be considered classical.

Contexts not commonly defined as classical



Instrumental music composed in last 10 years



Instrumental music for a movie soundtrack



Modern remix of famous composers from the past

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a pen, poised to write on a document. The background is dark and out of focus, emphasizing the hand and the pen. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Section C:

Five Directions for Change

Section C: Five Directions for Change

1 **Changes in radio programming will not be enough. Bring classical radio to where people are.**

Both listeners of color and younger listeners often use YouTube and streaming services to listen to music. It's not that broadcast radio is a thing of the past, it's that it's no longer the main pathway for equitable engagement with music. To reach younger BIPOC audiences, classical music radio must extend itself creatively into other platforms and settings – including live events. This may mean shedding some cherished ideas in the field and defining a new, multi-mode identity and presence – one that brings a unique value to every setting in which it appears.

Section C: Five Directions for Change

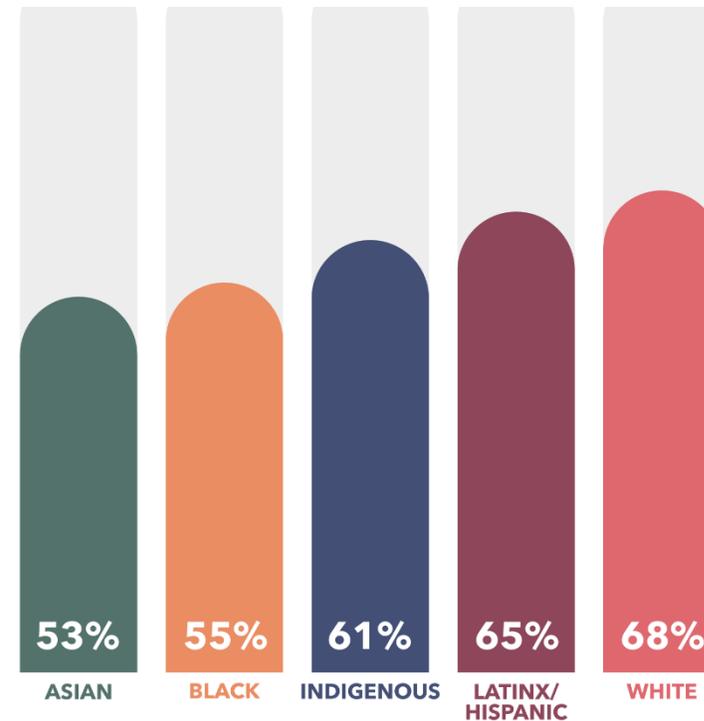
1: BRING CLASSICAL MUSIC TO WHERE PEOPLE ARE

Most people regularly tune in to radio, but not always for music listening.

The audience for terrestrial radio remains high. Fully 88% of U.S. adults are using radio on a weekly basis, according to Nielsen's March, 2021 Total Audience Report – with relatively similar access rates by race and ethnicity. However, in this study, only between 53% and 68% of each racial and ethnic group report listening to the radio *for music* on a weekly basis or more.

People who listen to the radio at least weekly often do so in the car. Most people in every racial and ethnic group, regardless of how frequently they listen, report that they have listened to their car radio at least once in the last 12 months (with Black respondents under the age of 40 being slightly less likely to use the car radio).

Percentage of each group listening to music on the radio at least weekly



Section C: Five Directions for Change

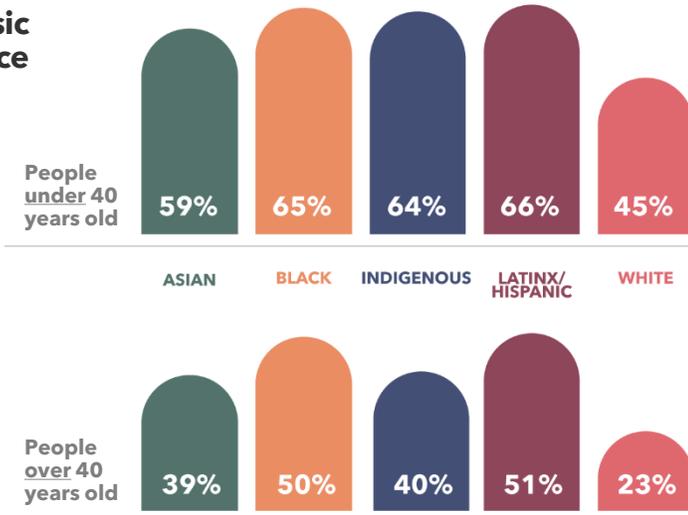
1: BRING CLASSICAL MUSIC TO WHERE PEOPLE ARE

YouTube and streaming apps are important ways that younger people of color connect with music.

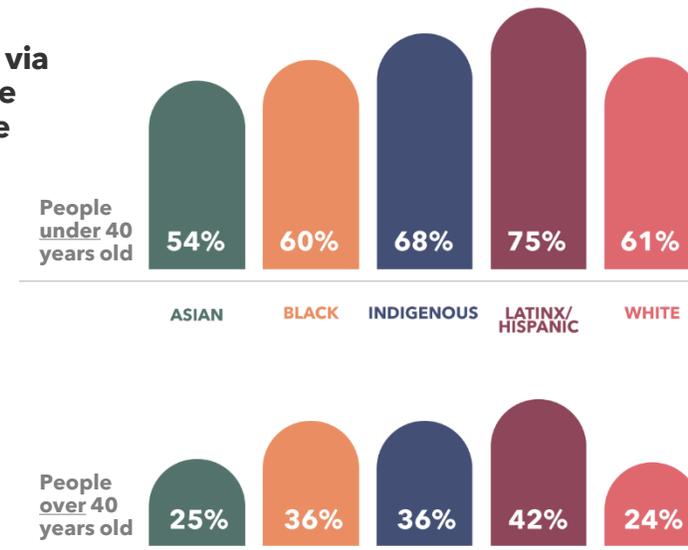
Younger people (those under age 40) are more likely than older ones to listen to music on YouTube. This is true for every racial and ethnic group in our survey. About two-thirds of young people in each BIPOC racial and ethnic group listen to music on YouTube “often” or “very often” (59% - 66%), while fewer than half of young White respondents do so (45%). And people of color over the age of 40 are more likely to listen via YouTube than older White people.

Younger people in every racial and ethnic group are also more likely than their older counterparts to listen to music via streaming apps. Between 54% and 75% of young people under age 40 in each group report listening to music via streaming “often” or “very often.”

Listening to music via YouTube twice a week more



Listening to music via a streaming service twice a week more



Section C: Five Directions for Change

1: BRING CLASSICAL MUSIC TO WHERE PEOPLE ARE

Many people of color say they would use YouTube to give classical music a try.

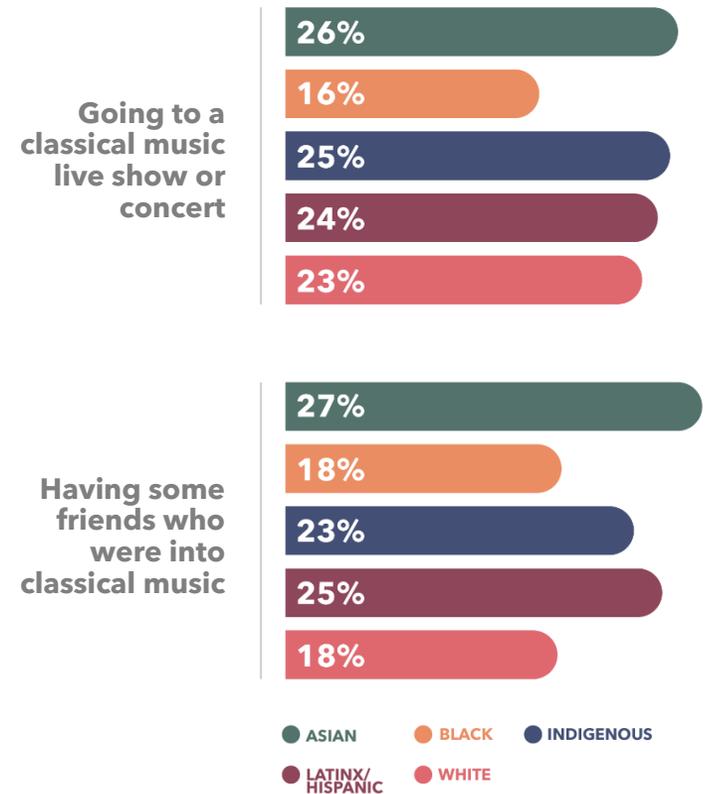
When asked about how they might like to give a new classical music program a try, people in every racial and ethnic group selected “YouTube” more frequently than any other method (Asian 57%, Black or African American 59%, Indigenous 49%, Hispanic or Latinx 55%, and White 42%).



Other potential ways to connect to classical music go beyond what’s possible with a typical radio program.

In the survey, we asked respondents to think about what might increase their interest in exploring classical music. Substantial proportions of each racial and ethnic group showed interest in person-to-person exchanges (like having friends to explore classical music with or seeing classical music live). Younger people, in particular, showed interest in experiences that focus on self-expression and sense of community.

Which of the following would be most likely to increase your interest in listening to classical music?



Section C: Five Directions for Change

2 Highlight classical's evolution beyond its White, European origins.

While many people of color don't need to see their identities represented in classical music in order to enjoy it, many do see classical as stuck in the past. A more contemporary – and historically accurate – picture of classical would highlight the past and present contributions to the art form by people from a wide range of backgrounds and geographies. Diversity and representation are important for many people as signals of welcome and respect, especially in communal spaces. And it's worth remembering that, even though most people listen to radio individually, a station's people, programming, advertising, etc. all constitute a "social environment," albeit a virtual or mediated one, and listeners are continually evaluating that environment for cues of trustworthiness and inclusion.

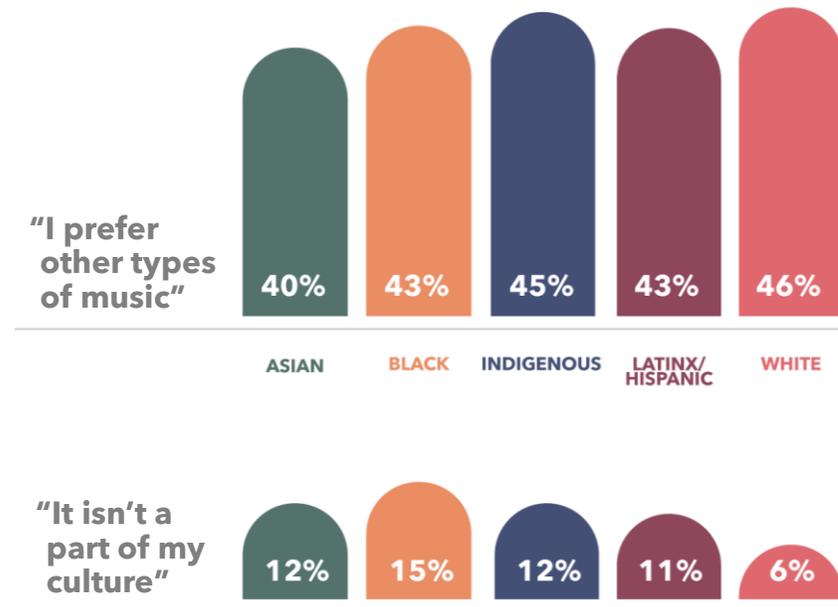
Section C: Five Directions for Change

2. HIGHLIGHT CLASSICAL'S EVOLUTION

Few people of any racial or ethnic background feel that there's a cultural barrier to their enjoyment of classical music.

For most people of color, the barrier isn't that they don't see classical music as part of their culture. What keeps them from listening to classical music more frequently is that they prefer other genres of music, or they listen to classical music only when it fits a specific mood or activity.

Reasons that people don't listen to classical music more often:



2. HIGHLIGHT CLASSICAL'S EVOLUTION

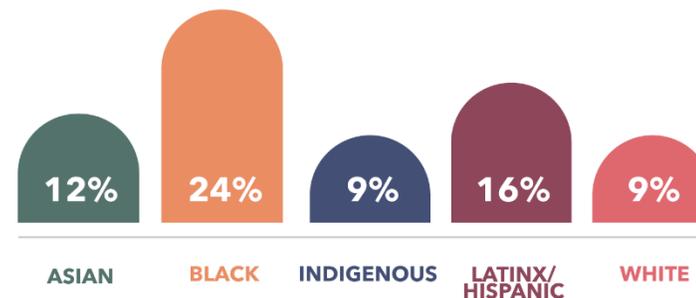
But representation is still an important signal. A subset of people would appreciate classical more if they knew that people of color were integral to the creation of the music.

In the qualitative interview phase of our study, participants were sympathetic to the notion that classical music's history is largely European. While they did not see this, in itself, as a barrier to enjoying and appreciating classical music, people from a variety of backgrounds said it would be encouraging to see or hear of more musicians and composers of color, and more women in those roles. Moreover, the national survey responses indicate that this may be of particular importance to Black respondents, who were more likely than other respondents to report that learning about the role people of color played in a classical piece would help them enjoy it.

% Who selected...

"How people of color were integral to either the creation of the classical piece or developing the style of music that it reflects"

...in their top three (out of eight) options that might help them enjoy a classical music piece



2. HIGHLIGHT CLASSICAL'S EVOLUTION

Many people of color also value seeing representation and diversity in spaces that are more social than radio, such as live music events and performances.

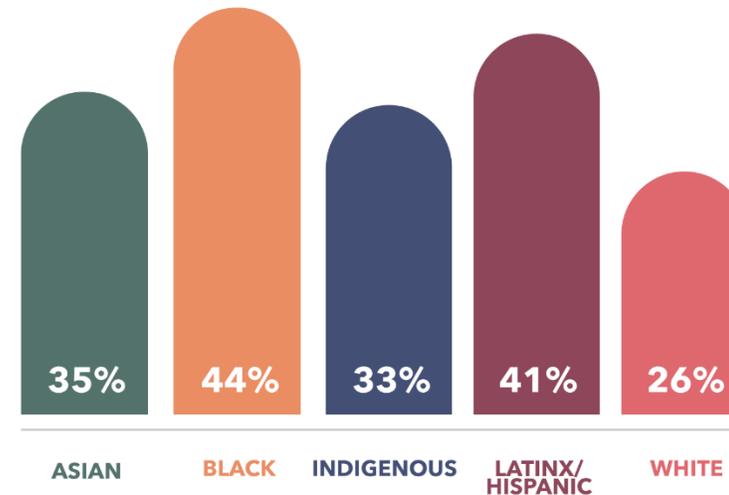
Substantial proportions of BIPOC survey respondents indicated that seeing their cultural heritage represented, or seeing people from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds around them, would help them feel comfortable at a live music event or performance.

While representation alone may not be enough to connect people of color to classical music, a *lack* of diversity in a communal or public classical space – like a radio station – could be taken as a signal that it's exclusionary. In contrast, seeing signs that a shared space respects multiple cultural heritages can be a signal of welcome and inclusion.

When you attend live music events or performances, what helps you feel most comfortable?

% Who selected...

"Seeing my cultural heritage represented" or "People from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds around me" or both



Section C: Five Directions for Change

3 **Highlight classical music's relevance by emphasizing its contemporary connections.**

This study indicates that, while efforts to humanize classical music and classical composers are important, new audiences may also need to see connections between classical music and contemporary culture to find it relevant to their own lives. So, in addition to showcasing stories about historical artists in their time, classical radio programming needs to highlight how classical music is relevant to the current moment and in dialogue with the world of today.

Section C: Five Directions for Change

3. EMPHASIZE CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

For people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, a sense of modernity would help them give classical a try.

We asked survey respondents what might help them give a classical piece a chance if they didn't immediately connect to its sound. No single aid to connection was the answer for everyone, suggesting that the field needs to experiment with varied approaches. A notable minority of people in each racial and ethnic group (18%–33%) were interested in learning about how a piece has impacted or inspired others.

In addition, about a quarter of each racial and ethnic group we surveyed (21%–27%) felt that learning about the hidden connections between a classical piece and modern music of other genres might help them enjoy a piece of classical music. And similar proportions said that learning how a classical piece has played a role in film, TV, gaming, comedy, sports, or other modern contexts (22%–28%). However, different racial and ethnic groups may lean toward different modern cultural references, as we saw with the musical landscapes specific to each racial and ethnic group outlined earlier in this report.

It's also possible that *other* strategies, beyond those we asked about in the survey, would help connect people to a classical piece. The key is to embrace the importance of contemporary cultural relevance as well as human, social stories.

	How the classical piece has impacted or inspired other people	How the classical piece has played a role in film, TV, gaming, comedy, sports, or other modern contexts	What hidden connections exist between the classical piece and modern music of other genres	How the artist who composed the classical piece worked through struggles and challenges to create the piece
ASIAN	33%	28%	27%	26%
BLACK	18%	22%	21%	24%
INDIGENOUS	29%	23%	23%	24%
LATINX/HISPANIC	33%	26%	23%	25%
WHITE	26%	25%	21%	29%

Section C: Five Directions for Change

4 Learn from BIPOC audiences' favorite hosts.

Creating a new classical experience may mean breaking away from the “expected” host and considering the kinds of personalities and voices people connect to in other contexts. For example, people already value the attributes of “energy” and “passion” in hosts generally, and these characteristics could translate well into classical music programming. Embracing humor may also be worth exploring, even though this can be a real departure from what people expect of a classical host.

Section C: Five Directions for Change

4. LEARN FROM PEOPLE'S FAVORITE HOSTS

People often regard their favorite hosts as funny, energetic, and passionate.

We asked survey respondents to think about the TV shows, podcasts, and/or radio programs that they listen to regularly and envision their favorite host. Across racial and ethnic groups, people overwhelmingly described their favorite hosts as “funny” (59%–68%) and “energetic” (46%–62%).

We also asked respondents to describe their ideal host for a classical music program. People generally selected traits that conformed with what they understood classical music to be: calming (46%–51%), warm (40%–48%), and passionate (39%–51%). Only 26%–30% of people in each racial and ethnic group described their ideal classical host as funny.

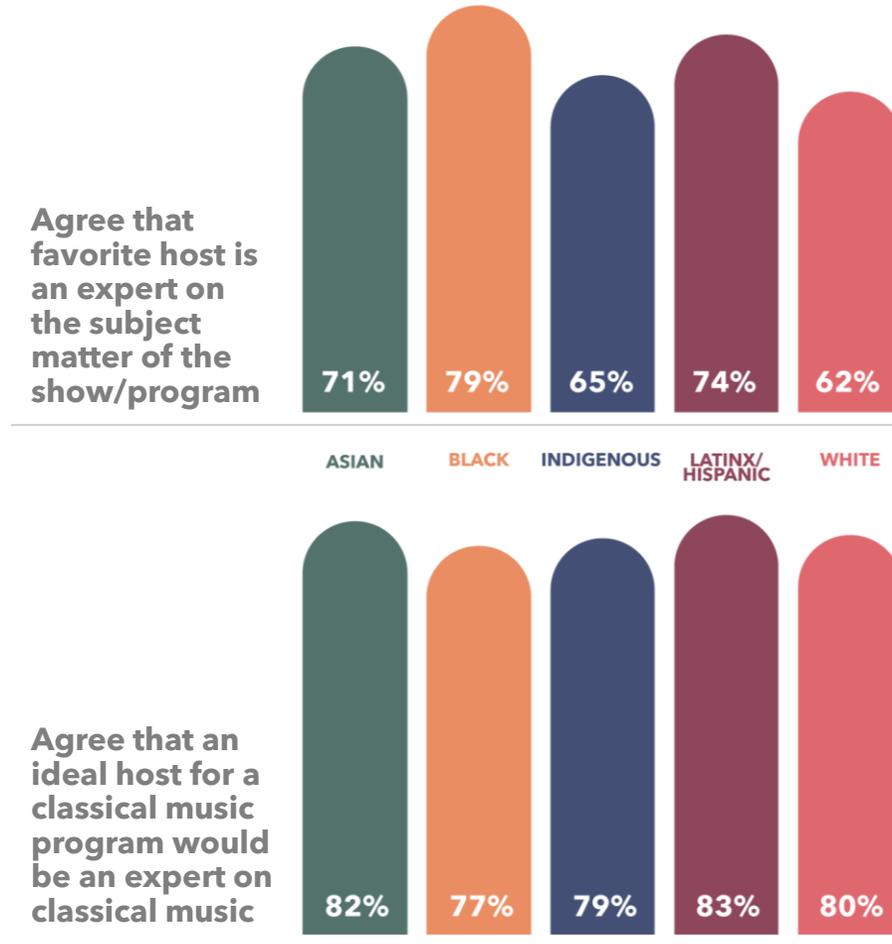
So, we see a discrepancy between *favorite* hosts overall and expectations for *classical* hosts.



4. LEARN FROM PEOPLE'S FAVORITE HOSTS

People overwhelmingly prefer hosts who are experts on the subject matter of the program.

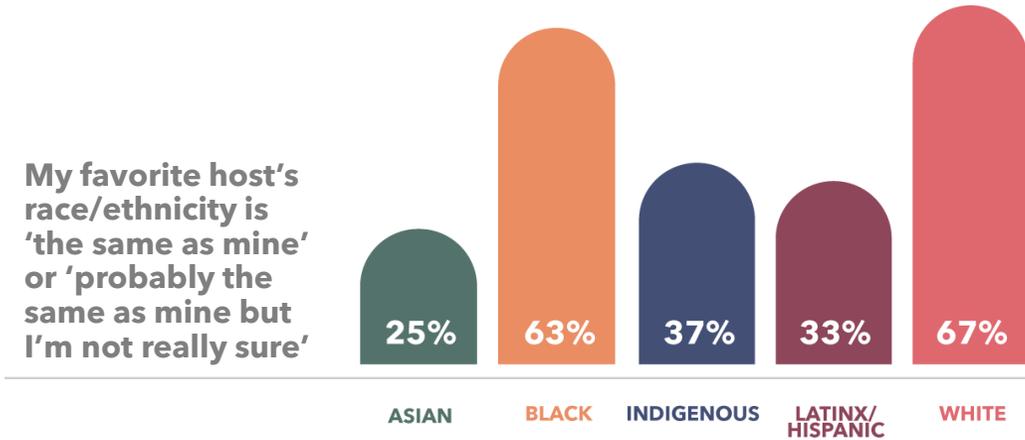
Across racial and ethnic groups, respondents reported that their favorite host was an expert on the subject matter of the program. When imagining their ideal host of a classical radio program, they also preferred a host who was an expert. For classical programs with multiple hosts, these findings may mean that at least one should be a subject-matter expert. And it's worth remembering that expertise doesn't always come in a serious, sober, or soothing form; it can also come with humor, energy, and passion.



Section C: Five Directions for Change

4. LEARN FROM PEOPLE’S FAVORITE HOSTS

Listeners of color have favorite hosts who may or may not match their own race and ethnicity – although the host’s identity may be particularly important to Black people.



Some people of color may gravitate toward radio hosts who share their racial and ethnic background. This is especially true of Black respondents, 63% of whom indicated that their favorite host’s race/ethnicity was either the same as theirs or probably the same as theirs.

But when we asked about a classical music program, most people were open to a host who does not share their race and ethnicity. For each racial and ethnic group, only between 5% and 14% of respondents indicated that their ideal host for a classical program would be of their same racial and ethnic background, with an additional 20% to 46% of each group indicating the “same as mine, but it doesn’t matter that much.”

Section C: Five Directions for Change

5 **Feel empowered to embrace a mood.**

This research shows that listeners often select their music from a “menu” of moods. Since many classical pieces were composed to evoke an evolving range of feelings, classical music lends itself easily to mood-setting – even where a single composition or movement expresses a range of different emotional tones. This emotive framing may be especially important for younger audiences, who are looking for music to match a wide variety of activities in their lives. Additionally, a variety of mood-based classical programs may make the music more accessible to listeners who see classical music as only good for “calming” purposes.

Section C: Five Directions for Change

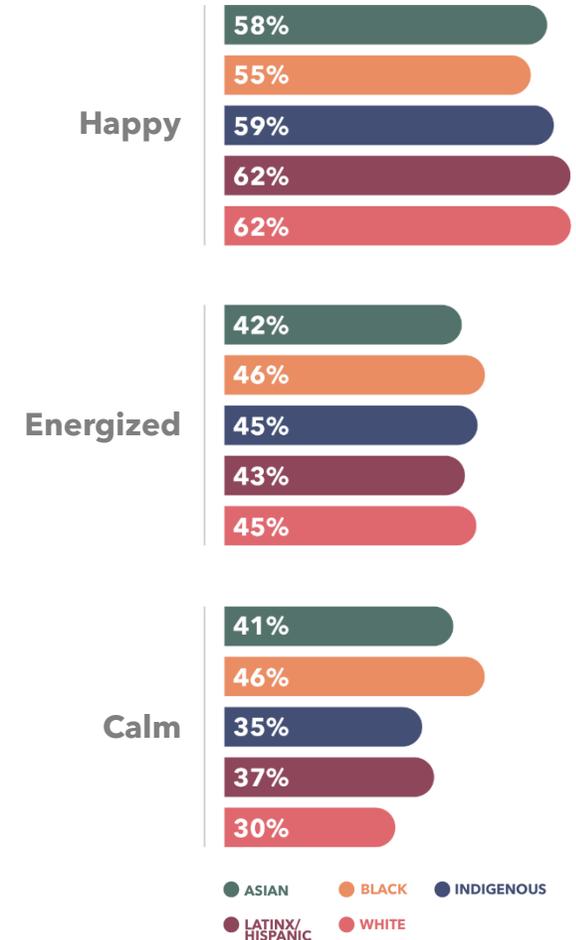
5. FEEL EMPOWERED TO EMBRACE A MOOD

Across racial and ethnic groups, music can be an important tool for people to shape their mood and emotional state.

People listen to music on the radio mainly to feel “happy,” “energized,” and “calm.” They also listen to music during a range of activities, such as driving, exercising, cleaning, and socializing – often with different emotional goals for each activity. (And younger people listen to music during a wider range of activities than older people.) So, listeners need tools not only to select specific pieces or genres of music, but to achieve the specific feelings and emotions they seek.

Classical music fits well into those purposes, since many classical pieces were composed to express and evoke emotional states, including sometimes intense and complex ones. Curated playlists or programs could center around an almost limitless range of moods or feelings. Organizing classical radio programs or streams around states like “inspired,” “creative,” or “energized” (as is already being done by users on Spotify and other platforms) would give listeners help “dialing into” specific emotions, rather than requiring them to select the artists, pieces, and movements that would contribute to that mood.

When you listen to music on AM/FM radio, what mood do you want this kind of music for?



Section C: Five Directions for Change

5. FEEL EMPOWERED TO EMBRACE A MOOD

In our open-ended interviews, people shared examples of how they used music to create a mood.

Nearly all the participants in the qualitative phase of our study spoke of having “go-to music” to energize them: for working out, cleaning, cooking, and to lift their spirits when they feel down. While common moods for listening emerged, there was no consensus around which genres of music would best create each mood; the “fit” and response was deeply personal, based on people’s individual experiences and exposures.

“

In the morning, I want music to pick me up and energize me. It gets me in the mood for the day, even if I feel crappy. I gotta get up.”

Interview participant, self-identified as Latinx/Hispanic

“

Depending on how my day goes, during my ride home I want something smooth or mellow or to listen to old-school rap music. Or if I'm a little down, I might turn on a gospel station to get inspiration from a gospel song.”

Interview participant, self-identified as Black

“

In high school, I had an amazing English teacher. Every time we would write, she would turn on classical music. It just helps my train of thought flow better. After that teacher, I dabbled my foot into it, as help for exams.”

Interview participant, self-identified as Asian

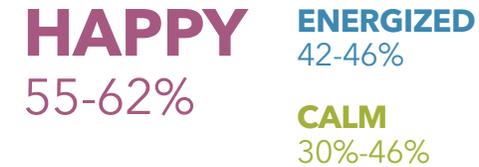
5. FEEL EMPOWERED TO EMBRACE A MOOD

Classical music may be limited by the dominant perception that it is primarily “calming.”

In the survey, we asked people what moods they think of when they hear the term “classical music.” Most people in every racial and ethnic group indicated that they thought of “calm” (54%-61%). Indeed, when we asked people to think about the reasons they may have listened to classical music in the last 12 months, substantial proportions of each group (36%-55%) indicated that they had listened to classical music to “feel calm.”

Similarly, in our open-ended interviews at the start of this study, people of color described classical music in terms of a wide emotional range, but still generally connected it to relaxation, focus, and calm.

When listening to music on the radio, people across racial and ethnic groups want to feel...



But when thinking about the term “classical music,” most people think of “calm” but not the other two qualities.





Conclusions:

Next steps for the field

Conclusions: Next steps for the field

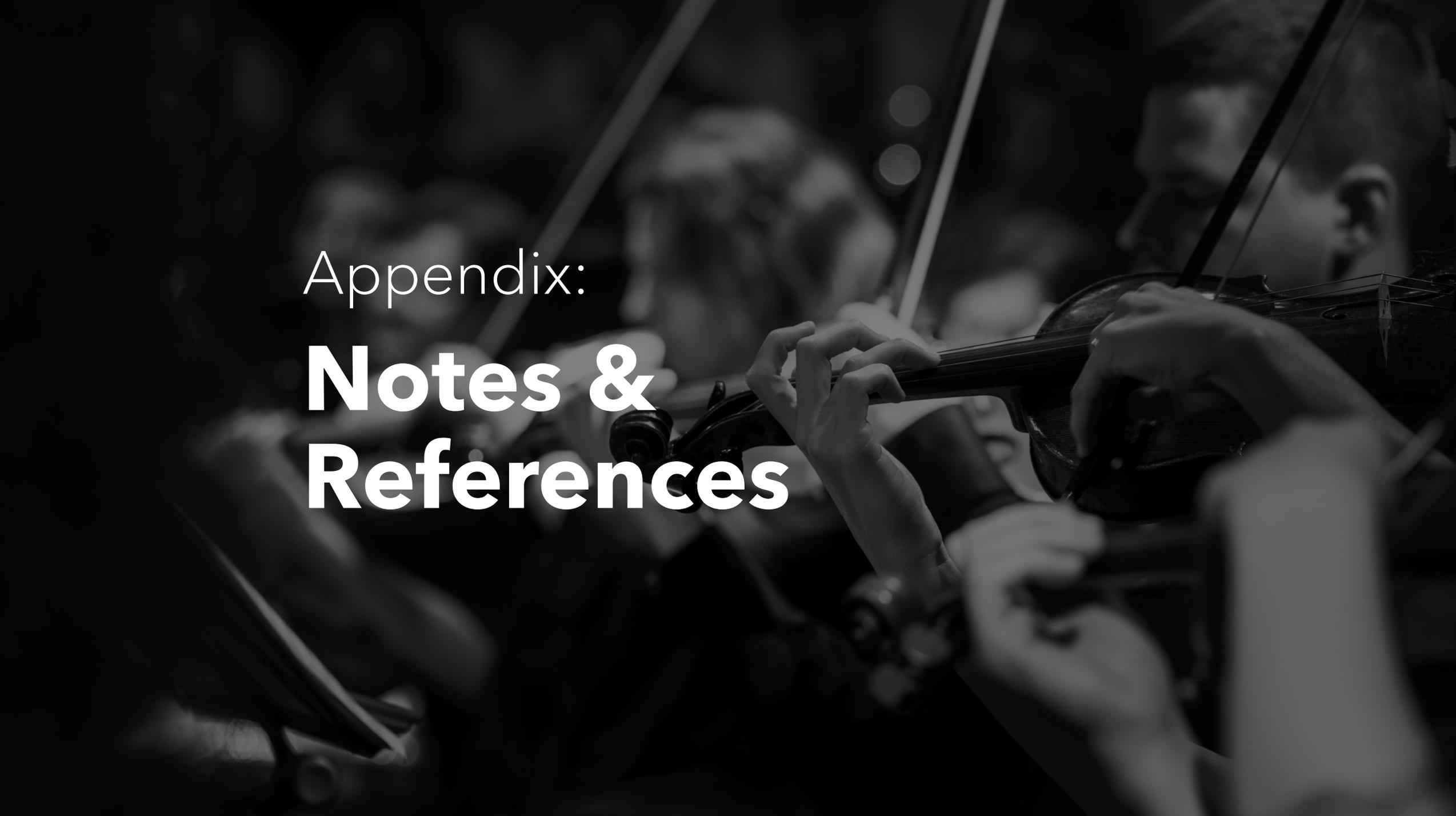
A STRONGER FOUNDATION FOR CREATIVITY (YES, YOURS.)

We hope this research gives classical music radio professionals – and everyone working to make this art-form more equitable, welcoming, and inclusive in both media-based and live contexts – new ideas and sharper focus for the hard work of innovation.

We know that these questions about racial equity and audience diversity aren't new, and that many exciting experiments are already taking place around the field. National studies like this one can help you be more intentional and responsive as you plan, design, implement, and evaluate new engagement strategies on-air and in your community. But this research is just a beginning. It will be essential to **bring qualitative and co-creative research methods into the innovation process itself**, working with (not just *for*) communities of color and younger people in your community to make progress toward inclusion and welcome together.

These findings are also a reminder to all of us to question our assumptions about the role of race and ethnicity in classical music listening.

To be sure, racism and exclusion are real and endemic in this domain, as they are in every domain of American life. The challenge is to listen to, and work with, the full complexity of perceptions and preferences expressed by people of color and younger people. Otherwise, we risk perpetuating the status quo and repeating the mistakes or limitations of the past. **Courage will be needed, as will the ability to give up control.** We need to respect people's own operative definitions of classical music and meet them on their own cultural terms. We need to trust that, for many people of all races and ethnicities, the music itself is relevant and pleasurable, at least for certain purposes or moods – but that the ways we've been framing, delivering, defining, and disconnecting it from other forms of music and culture must change if we truly want to become more welcoming and equitable.



Appendix:

Notes & References

NOTES ON RACE & ETHNICITY CATEGORIES

We've made choices for how to categorize race and ethnicity in this report in order to provide a clearer picture of findings. One limitation of our approach is that it does not provide a comprehensive picture of people with multiple racial and ethnic identities.

In this report, we present data from the five surveyed racial and ethnic groups in alphabetical order. We acknowledge that these categories are an imperfect measure, as there are many diverse cultures and communities represented within each racial and ethnic group. Although the full question text regarding race and ethnicity in the survey provide more detailed description of each race and ethnicity, for the purposes of space in this report we have abbreviated the names of each of these groups to: Asian, Black or African American, Indigenous, Latinx or Hispanic, and White. We've capitalized the names of all of these self-selected and historically contended groupings, including White, so as not to treat that category any differently than the others. (We occasionally put White in lowercase when used in phrases like "white supremacy").

In cases where someone selected more than one race or ethnicity, we had to make decisions about how to categorize people for the purpose of analysis. In order to have a sufficient sample of Indigenous people, if someone identified as "Indigenous" and another race or ethnicity we included them in the "Indigenous" sample. Similarly, if someone selected Hispanic or Latinx and another race (other than Indigenous) we included them in the Latinx or Hispanic sample. Finally, a small number of people (3.7% of the sample) selected more than one race (and did not select "Indigenous" or "Hispanic or Latinx"). This group of multiracial individuals was too small and too heterogeneous to be analyzed as a separate group. However, we did not want to lose these important perspectives from this study. As a result, we randomly categorized these individuals into one of the identities that they selected. We recognize that this may not be a wholly accurate categorization of how people understand themselves but felt it was preferable to excluding multiracial voices from this study.

And while we write about differences between racial and ethnic groups at a categorical level, we hope that readers will avoid ascribing group characteristics to any one individual, as individuals are inherently unique. We aim to be cognizant of how research results might negatively play into stereotypes or negative assumptions that exist around race, ethnicity, and/or age – and we have incorporated multiple steps of reflection to ensure that we are reporting in ways that are respectful, intentional, and place a responsibility of change first on classical music practitioners rather than on BIPOC audiences.

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Questions? Comments? Ideas for action or further exploration?

Whether you work in listener-supported media, live music presenting, other areas of the arts, or the research and evaluation field, we'd love to hear from you. Please email Classical KING CEO Brenda Barnes at brendab@king.org and Slover Linett vice president Tanya Treptow, PhD at tanya@sloverlinett.com.



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